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For Immediate Release

HHS Announces 988 Launch July 16

(Des Moines, IA). The Iowa Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) announces the launch of 988, The National Suicide Prevention Line (NSPL) three-digit number to call for individuals in suicidal crisis or emotional distress. Iowans who contact 988 will be directly connected to trained crisis counselors who provide crisis de-escalation and connect individuals to the services and supports they need, when they need it.

An easy to remember three-digit number will not only make it easier to connect to support in a crisis, it will also:

- Reduce the burden on law enforcement and emergency medical resources so they can better respond to other public safety needs.
- Provide access to mobile response through warm handoffs, reducing confusion on how to access the service and enhance mobile response efforts statewide.
- Increase the number of contacts answered by Iowans knowledgeable about local behavioral health services, providing a personalized experience during a time of crisis and allowing for in-state quality assurance.

“The national launch of 988 coincides with the significant work we’ve been doing here in Iowa since I took office to enhance and improve our historically fragmented crisis response system. Iowa families - all families - should have quick and easy access to necessary mental and behavioral health care resources when they need them, and 988 will serve as a centralized resource for Iowans to utilize during their times of need.” said Governor Kim Reynolds.

Iowa has two NSPL Centers, CommUnity and Foundation 2. Foundation 2 is staffing to answer the majority of 988 calls, and CommUnity is staffing to answer the majority of 988 chats and texts. Both Centers will be equipped to answer calls, chats, and texts. Iowa’s Lifeline Centers will provide follow-up to individuals contacting 988 who are at risk of suicide and consent to follow-up. Crisis counselors will provide seamless coordination with other community-based crisis services, including warm handoffs to mobile response teams throughout the state.

HHS also operates Your Life Iowa, which provides free, 24/7 support available for anyone dealing with mental health concerns, thoughts of suicide, substance use, problem alcohol use, or problem gambling. In State Fiscal Year 2022, Your Life Iowa responded to 41,111 contacts that were received via phone text and chat. These numbers represent 185% increase since 2020.

“The pandemic exposed and magnified the strain families are facing today. Connecting Iowans to quick and reliable support for emotional distress through 988 marks a sea change in how we approach crisis response”, said Iowa HHS Director Kelly Garcia. “The need for these resources is increasing, we see it in our data and in our existing services. Your Life Iowa had a record number

of contacts in May of this year. Our teams are ready to answer more calls, texts, and chats, and to be a lifeline when Iowans use 988.”

The 988 system is designed to complement the 911 system, and coordination between the two is vital in the development of a coordinated and comprehensive crisis response system. Crisis Counselors receive culturally sensitive trainings in crisis response. 988 is an important step in building equitable access to crisis services across Iowa and building a “no wrong door” approach to a coordinated and comprehensive mental health crisis system, aligning with SAMHSA’s Best Practices Toolkit.

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) designated 988 as the new three-digit number for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline on July 16, 2020. The U.S. Senate passed the National Suicide Hotline Designation Act (S. 2661), establishing 988, in May 2020, and the U.S. House of Representatives passed the legislation in September 2020. The National Suicide Hotline Designation Act of 2020 was signed into law on October 17, 2020.

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